

24 May 2019

Kyrgyzstan: Meeting of Coalition against Torture aggressively interrupted by members of Youth Patriotic Movement of Kyrgyzstan

On 23 May 2019, the Working Meeting organised in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan by a union of human rights organisations known as the **Coalition against Torture** was interrupted by nine unknown individuals. The group claimed that the meeting had been financed by Western countries and was aimed at destabilising peace in Kyrgyzstan.

Coalition against Torture is a union of 17 non-governmental organisations as well as independent civil society activists working to prevent and combat torture and ill-treatment in Kyrgyzstan. The Coalition monitors detention facilities, provides legal aid for the victims of torture and ill-treatment, and assists in their rehabilitation.

On 23 May 2019, a group of nine unknown individuals carrying cameras and voice recorders, who later introduced themselves as representatives of the Youth Patriotic Movement of Kyrgyzstan, broke into the conference room where the Coalition's meeting was being held, aggressively demanding it to stop. They claimed that Western countries and the organisations financed by them were trying to destabilise peace in Kyrgyzstan. The meeting participants filmed the intervention and filed a complaint to the Alamedin District Department of Internal Affairs of the police for "hooliganism" and obstruction of the professional activities of an attorney at law.

The Working Meeting of lawyers and attorneys at law, which took place between 21 and 23 May 2019, was dedicated to a discussion with international experts, concerning the current legal practice in cases of torture on a national and international level. After the actual aims of the meeting had been clarified to the attackers, they stated that they had been misinformed.

According to local human rights defenders, this is not the first time that this group has interfered with the professional activities of lawyers. In the past, they interrupted a training of lawyers held in the same conference hall. The Youth Patriotic Movement of Kyrgyzstan has been targeting human rights defenders and organisations since 2011, as part of their mission to "monitor unlawful initiatives of the foreign diplomatic missions and international organisations, along with their local partners, to prevent destabilisation in the country".

Front Line Defenders expresses its concern about the attack against the professional activities of the Coalition against Torture, as it is believed to be solely motivated by the peaceful and legitimate human rights work of the Coalition, and aimed at intimidating and harassing human rights organisations working on torture and ill-treatment.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Kyrgyzstan to:

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the aggressive intervention during the Working Meeting of the Coalition against Torture, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
2. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Kyrgyzstan are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.

Front Line Defenders respectfully reminds you that the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998, recognises the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders, their right to freedom of association and to carry out their activities without fear of reprisals. We would particularly draw your attention to Article 9 (3)(c): “everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, inter alia: (c) To offer and provide professionally qualified legal assistance or other relevant advice and assistance in defending human rights and fundamental freedoms”, and to Article 12 (2): “*The State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threat, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration.*”

Please inform us of any actions that may be taken with regard to the above case.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Anderson
Executive Director